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Cover Page



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INTRODUCTION

The Iran-Iraq war began on September 22, 1980 when Iraq attacked the border towns of Iran. The war lasted for eight years. The Iran-Iraq war is the longest conventional battle since World War II. It is estimated that on both sides there is about one million dead and three million wounded, thousands of prisoners, millions of homeless, and many cities were badly damaged.² On July 17, 1988, Iran accepted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, compared accepting the Resolution to "drinking poison".³ The Resolution asked two countries to observe ceasefire and return to their homeland.⁴ The fight was legitimized by defining it as conflict between Islam and blasphemy, and aimed to overthrow and to punish the Baath party in Baghdad. The roots of this conflict are not clear. Some scholars say that it was the result of a personal conflict between Saddam Hosein (1937-2006) and Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1998). Some researchers trace the reason for the war back to antiquity and the relationship between their predecessors. For several historians it is a conflict of Arabs versus Persians rooted in the Muslim invasion of Iran. For others, it is the result of a struggle between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids in the sixteenth century.⁵ Finding the historical roots of the conflict, and geo-political issues ended to the war are beyond the scope of this study to examine.

The chief aim of this study is to explore how classical Persian poetry and the Persian mysticism that is interwoven with the poetry have been used in the new politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially during the Iran-Iraq war. By employing mystical ideals the poets inflamed longing for self-annihilation in the soldiers. As a result of fundamental

² E. Ghareeb, "The Roots of Crisis: Iraq and Iran," in *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strugedy, Law and Diplomacy*, ed. Ch. C. Joyner, New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1990, pp. 21-23.

³ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴ *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*, Supplement. no.7, vol. VI, Articles 92-105 and 108-111 of the Charter, Covering the period 1 January 1985 to 31 December 1988, New York: United Nations, 2004, p. 95, no. 321.

⁵ E. Ghareeb, "The Roots of Crisis: Iraq and Iran," in *The Persian Gulf War*, p. 23.

change of the mystical motifs to political concepts motivated the Iranian public to the battlefield. These themes were used in other political situations, i.e., to support the revolutionaries in Constitutional Revolution 1906-11, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This study is important because it shows that poetry has been a motivating factor for many Iranians especially during the Iran-Iraq war. Young people read poetry for entertainment. Several of them participated in official poetry nights or in small non-official gatherings to recite their poems. Writing and presenting one's ideas and thoughts eloquently is admired among Iranians. It is taken for granted in a political situation that one has the ability to present his thoughts, and will benefit from the opportunity to assimilate his thoughts and to show his skill in writing poetry. I am not claiming that war poets lacked political backgrounds. Many poets during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war wrote in order to motivate the community for the Islamic ideals. My study will show how, during the war, both the celebrated poets i.e. 'Ali Musavi Garmārudi (b. 1320), or Qeysar Aminpur (1959-2007), and comparatively unknown poets i.e., Samad Parviz, and Shahāb, used classical mystical and religious metaphors in their poems.

In an Iranian context, ideals and concepts are transmitted through poetry quicker and easier than prose. The Iranian public is receptive to poetry, in which classical motifs are put in new political contexts and provide the opportunity for Iranians to compare themselves with mystical figures such as Hosein Mansur Hallāj (857-922), or religious figures such as imam Hosein and his companions (626-680). This comparison will lead Iranians to believe that they are able to emulate the historic act of self-sacrifice and give their lives for a higher cause.

To my knowledge, there is no scholarly work that shows how Iran's literary tradition is applied in war poetry in modern Iran, and how poets inspired a sense of self-sacrifice in Iranian youth. A significant point of this work is that it provides the reader with the opportunity to journey between both classical texts and modern poetry. Thus, they will see the differences between mystical attitudes toward asceticism and self-mortification versus those of war poets, and the mystical concept of spiritual elevation versus martyrdom. This work illustrates to what extent mystical motifs are fundamentally changed for political purposes.

METHODOLOGY

In selecting martial poems, I have limited myself to those composed during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88). In several cases, I have given examples from poems composed after the war, because they show how the mystical themes, propagated during the war, were received afterwards. To distinguish these poems, I have inserted the year of composition, if applicable, beside them.

To show how extensively Persian poetry is used in modern Iran, I have paid more attention to the metaphors and motifs that are central to classical texts, and are popular in war poetry. It may be said that it is the poem, which transmits ideals, beliefs and attitudes that lead to specific actions/reactions by the audience such as happiness, anger, or revenge. For example, the narrative of imam Hosein's death in war poetry reminds Shiites of Iran of the hardships that Hosein and his family endured. On the military front, when a soldier compares himself to imam Hosein he can believe that he is able to patiently tolerate the war and its afflictions, and is responsible for avenging the blood of imam Hosein with the blood of his murderers' heirs. For this study the message itself is more important than the narrator who is conveying it. On many occasions most Iranians are repeating a poem, an anecdote or a proverb without paying attention to who the speaker/ writer is.

In this study my objectives are: 1) to illustrate how poetry is used as a political tool in modern twentieth-century Iran; 2) to analyze the mystical and religious motifs and concepts of classical Persian literature and their influence on Iranian self-sacrifice in the fight against the Iraqi enemy, I address both the famous classical figures and the war poets. I have taken the classical texts as foreground for the war poems to illustrate how the mystical meanings of various motifs were fundamentally changed and found new meaning in war poetry, encouraging the act of self-sacrifice.

For the motifs and concepts, I have chosen those popularly employed by the Iranian mystics to express the superiority of self-purification to the mundane desires. For the Qur'ānic verses, *hadith* and historical narratives, I have relied on the mystical treatises used by mystics to justify their ideas. In this process, first I read the war poems and selected sections with mystical and religious themes; secondly, I studied the classical texts and mystical treatises; then, I looked up the Qur'ānic verses, *hadith* and historical narratives that

are mentioned in both treatise and poem. Afterwards, I referred to the mystics' treatises as the foreground of my study, and explained how a mystical motif applied to the war poetry, found a new political meaning. There are several references that indicate how the clerics in their sermons used several mystical and religious themes. Later, the themes were transformed into slogans repeated in rallies or after congregational prayers by Iranian public during and after the war.

For this study, I have relied on classical mystical works such as *Hadiqat al-haqiqah va shari'at al-tariqa* ('The Garden of Truth and the Holy Law of the Path') by Sanā'i Ghaznavi (ca. 1087- 1130) as standard texts for the mystical motifs and concepts used by the war poets. Sanā'i elaborated on the doctrines of Sufism and his work is a source on ascetic doctrines and mystical thought, which has become a standard work inspiring many mystic writers.⁶ I have made several references to *Elāhi-nāme* ('The Divine Book') by Farid al-Din 'Attār Neyshāburi (ca. 1145-1221), in which 'Attār elaborates on mystic love. This concept was widely used by the war poets. In his *Manteq al-Teyr* ('Conference of the Birds'), 'Attār uses allegorical language to illustrate the progress of a mystic in the path towards Union with the Beloved.⁷ *Kolliyyāt-e Shams Tabrizi* by Jalāl al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) is the most famous mystical work that I have used here. In it I found several mystical themes and motifs, which are employed by the war poets. Persian war poets make a wide range of references to these works.

From the mystic Ahmad Ghazālī (d. 1126), I have borrowed the concepts, which he elaborated on in his treatise on love entitled *Savāneh*, which discusses the secret of profound love, its divine source, and the hardships that a lover has to endure in the path of spiritual perfection. On the importance of this book, Ritter writes that *Savāneh* inspired 'Attār to compose his *Manteq al-Teyr*.⁸ I have also drawn on *Kashf al-Mahjub* ('Revelation of the Veiled') by the mystic Hojviri (d.ca.1072). This is a useful source for information on the mystical tenets, doctrines and practices of the early Islamic mystics.⁹

To my knowledge, the use of classical mystical and religious themes in modern

⁶ A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979, p. 107.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ H. Ritter, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2) under al- Ghazālī.

⁹ H. Hosain, & H. Masse, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Hudjwīrī.

political context is very new. In many countries poetry has functioned differently. For instance, during the years of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi poets used Bedouin themes to encourage the Iraqi soldiers to fight against Iran. Because many of the poets participated in the war, they on the one hand, relied on the themes such as death, destruction, and sorrow.¹⁰ On the other hand, the poets focused on Pan-Arabism¹¹ to unify people to fight against Iran. To cite another example, poetry in the form of ode was used in France to convey revolutionary ideals. During the years of French Revolution, the poets composed Romantic odes and recited it in the revolutionary festivals (1789-99).¹²

¹⁰ E.A. Ghareeb, with the assistance of B. K. Dougherty, *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 184.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹² A. Esterhammer, "The Romantic Ode: History, Language, Performance," in *Histoire Comparee des Litteratures de Langues Europeennes: Romantic Poetry*, ed. A. Esterhammer, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002, p. 144.

